

GTA prepares to upgrade state's network with MPLS technology

GTA is preparing to upgrade the state's data network with new, more advanced technology following successful pilot projects at two state agencies.

A request for proposal to replace frame relay with multi-protocol label switching (MPLS) on the state's wide area network is scheduled to be released in the first quarter of 2004.

The RFP will be posted on the state's procurement Web site at www.procurement.state.ga.us. Interested vendors can register on the site to receive a notification by e-mail when the RFP is released. State agencies will be involved in developing the RFP and evaluating proposals.

MPLS will provide enhanced technical support for distance learning, telemedicine and teleworking.

The change in technology will increase the network's speed and reliability while positioning the state to implement future capabilities more easily and quickly than in the past.

MPLS offers many advantages over current technology.

It improves speed and reliability by enabling network operators to reroute traffic around bottlenecks and broken links.

MPLS makes it possible to assign different classes of service to network traffic on a case-by-case basis. Applications requiring a higher quality of service, like video conferencing, can travel in the network equivalent of an HOV lane.

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Telecom changes respond to customer feedback

GTA's telecom customers are experiencing changes in the way services are delivered, and many of the changes are in direct response to customer feedback.

The changes include new ways of placing telecom service orders and reporting problems. To place an order, customers now send an e-mail or a fax to their telecom regional office. To report a service problem, they call their telecom regional office or send an e-mail if the problem is

Telecom service personnel will be able to provide more responsive, personalized customer service.

minor.

We have also divided metro Atlanta into three geographic regions—North, Central and South—and have begun assigning telecom service personnel to customers based on the region in which the offices are located. This means telecom service personnel will know more about an office's telecom services and business needs. They will be able to provide more responsive, personalized customer service. The changes will also increase accountability by

enabling GTA to measure more accurately how we respond to a customer's service requests.

Telecom customers have consistently said they want full-service operations to be available at the local level, so GTA is bringing back customer service representatives to our team of technicians and project managers in the Milledgeville and Columbus

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*Bringing the benefits of technology
to Georgia government*

DHR/GTA join for greater SUCCESS

Busy mornings in the office had become frustrating for **Department of Human Resources** (DHR) staff across the state who depend on SUCCESS, the application that determines eligibility for people requesting public assistance and food stamps. The online application wasn't always there when workers needed it. Because of heavy processing cycles, workers were unable to use the application a third of the time—about 10 days each month. They had to take applications manually, then key the information obtained from the interview into SUCCESS at a later time—a very time-consuming process and a duplication of work. Worse yet, the application downtime meant clients' benefits were often delayed by several days.

Derrick Wheeler, director of GTA's Division of Information Resources, said bringing together the DHR business owners and IT specialists and GTA to improve the performance of SUCCESS was a priority. "We are fully committed to investigating issues and taking corrective steps," Mr. Wheeler said. "Underperforming applications negatively impact the agency's ability to provide services and, at the same time, waste limited computing resources that cannot be recovered."

A joint DHR/GTA process improvement work group convened to identify and solve the problems. As a result, SUCCESS was up and running on time every day in October and November.

Online SUCCESS is scheduled to be up Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., but, many mornings, the work group found that daily batching cycles often made the system unavailable to workers until later. The work group took several actions to remedy the problem:

- Temporarily adjusting the online schedule to end each day at 5:45 p.m. so that batch processing could start earlier.
- Allocating more system resources for batch processing.
- Making changes to three large batch jobs, which saved nine hours each night.
- Improving archiving of data to store electronic records and reduce the amount of data that is processed each night.

- Making database copies on disk, which is faster than tape.

DHR program consultant **Diane Smith** has seen a tremendous difference. "If we can't key in the information, clients can't get the help they need," she said. "Reducing unscheduled downtime has had a very positive impact on the caseworkers' ability to complete their work and get benefits issued in a timely manner."

The impact of the improvements reaches beyond the SUCCESS application, according to Mr. Wheeler. "For the state data center, the success of the work group translates into more batch time available to run work for other agencies and DHR and significant staff support time that can be applied to a long backlog of work," he said.

Mr. Wheeler added that the joint work group proved so successful that DHR and GTA are forming other teams to look into performance issues in other applications. ■

SONET ring provides redundancy on data network

The state's data network is close to having complete redundancy, thanks to the installation of synchronous optical network (SONET) ring technology.

Network administrators can now redirect traffic around congested areas and breaks in the network.

"If we get a fiber cut at one point in the data center, we can route traffic around the cut to keep users up and running at all times," said **Andrée Greer** of GTA's Telecommunications Division, who oversaw several network projects this past fall.

The new technology also strengthens the state's disaster-recovery capabilities.

GTA completed the installation of the SONET ring on the state's network in October 2003 and then began connecting individual data circuits to the ring. All circuits—including frame relay, synchronous network architecture (SNA) and Internet circuits—were scheduled to be connected to the ring by the end of 2003. ■



State agencies are using information technology more effectively to raise customer-service levels and operate more efficiently, said **Tommy Hills**, Georgia's chief financial officer. He gave a keynote address at the Southeast Government Technology Conference in Atlanta on November 20. He said agencies, despite impressive successes, can stretch state dollars further and accomplish even more through greater sharing of IT resources.

Governor's panel reviews IT projects

Senior executives in the Governor's office have formed a panel to monitor the status of IT projects with a significant impact on state programs and operations.

The panel members are

- **Jim Lientz**, chief operating officer
- **Tommy Hills**, chief financial officer
- **Tim Connell**, director of the Office of Planning and Budget
- **Tom Wade**, state CIO and GTA executive director.

The goal of the review panel is to ensure that selected IT projects are completed on time, on budget and do what they are intended to do. Projects are chosen for on-going review because of their estimated cost or importance in automating critical processes. The panel's activities align with GTA's strategic direction to improve IT decision-making, investments and implementation.

The panel meets on a regular basis with program managers and IT professionals from the agencies

whose projects are being followed. The panel monitors projects from their planning stage all the way through implementation. GTA works with agencies to assess projects and prepare for the panel's reviews.

The panel is currently providing oversight on several projects, including

- the upgrade of the state's Human Resources Management System at GTA
- Safe Futures, a child-welfare system, at the **Department of Human Resources (DHR)**
- the Bioterrorism Preparedness Program at **DHR's Public Health Division** to detect, investigate and respond to incidents of bioterrorism in Georgia
- the Student Information System at the **Department of Education**
- MultiHealthNet at the **Department of Community Health**. ■

As for future capabilities, MPLS is an important step toward convergence. It lays a solid foundation for transmitting voice, data and video together on a single network.

MPLS is scalable, which means it can be easily expanded as the state's demand for network capacity increases.

Greater support for distance learning, telemedicine, teleworking

MPLS will provide the state with enhanced technical support for distance learning and telemedicine. It will also offer the flexibility needed to support teleworking more effectively because it can connect networks of varying data-transmission sizes and speeds.

An employee working from home or another remote location may need access to his agency's LAN to check office e-mail or work on a database or document stored on his personal drive. At the same time, he may need access to a mainframe application at the state data center.

With a DSL connection and MPLS, the state can provide a teleworking employee with access to all the systems he needs.

DOR pilot project increases operating efficiencies

Before proceeding with the RFP, GTA began two MPLS trials with different state agencies and vendors. The trials involved

- the **Department of Revenue** (DOR) and BellSouth
- the **Department of Technical and Adult Education** (DTAE) and AT&T.

As part of the trial with DOR, MPLS was implemented at 12 regional offices throughout Georgia. DOR is a leader among state agencies in transforming paper documents into electronic format for easier storage, but before MPLS, the regional offices lacked sufficient bandwidth to view some electronic documents clearly.

The upgrade resulted in 10 times the data-transmission bandwidth previously available at the offices, said **Lowery Scarbrough**, a member of DOR's IT staff involved with the trial. Despite the greatly expanded bandwidth, the costs of operating DOR's network did not increase, he said.

Thanks to greater bandwidth, the regional offices can easily access income tax applications, and they now have direct access to reports that previously had to be printed at DOR's main office in Atlanta and mailed to them.

The cutover from 56K to T-1 lines at all 12 offices took only 11 days. It also involved enhancing security with strengthened firewalls and an encrypted Virtual Private Network between DOR's main Atlanta office and the regional offices.

The bottom line for DOR is being able to collect revenues more quickly, thanks to the faster speeds and greater efficiencies that MPLS makes possible, said **John Link**, DOR assistant commissioner for technology.

"A big thanks to **Tom Wade** and **Renee Herr** and her group," Mr. Link said. "It's been a tremendous help to us and to our regional offices. We really appreciate it."

DTAE looks to MPLS for more reliable, robust network

DTAE uses the state's data network to access the Internet more than any other state entity because so much instruction takes place online. As a result, DTAE needs a "reliable, robust and high-performance network," said **Debbie Dlugolenski**, assistant commissioner for planning, development and technology.

MPLS promises to provide the enhanced performance that's necessary for Georgians to readily access resources at any of DTAE's colleges, which are dispersed throughout the state.

"We're excited by the pilot," Ms. Dlugolenski said. "It has tremendous potential for us and other agencies. It will be an especially great resource for telecommuting in rural Georgia." ■

Telecom products and services catalog now available

GTA recently issued the first edition of its Telecommunications Products and Services Catalog. It describes telecom products and services currently sold or managed by GTA.

The catalog will be updated regularly and new products and services will be added as they become available.

The catalog can be found on GTA's Web site at www.gta.georgia.gov. You can also request copies from your GTA account manager or telecom regional manager. ■

A strong team makes it possible to meet customer needs

Before she got into technology 16 years ago, **Robin Black** found that most jobs quickly became boring. Now, as GTA's regional operations manager for the Savannah region, Ms. Black couldn't have a dull day if she tried.

She and her team are GTA's front-line telecommunications staff for 28 counties in southeast Georgia. They manage telecom projects from design to installation for GTA customers—state agency offices, university campuses, and city and county governments.

"Technology is definitely the right field for me," Ms. Black said. "It keeps changing, and there is always new territory."

And there are always new projects. In the planning stages is a large project at Fort Stewart, estimated at \$1.5 to \$3 million. GTA will oversee connecting more than 40 buildings with fiber and installing inside cabling.

Just completed in December is a project with the **Department of Technical and Adult Education** to link campuses in Glennville and Vidalia. Making the campuses part of the same network will make communication easier and enable the schools to save on long distance charges.

The staff also is working on a PBX system for the new Camden County campus of **Coastal Georgia Community College**.

Ms. Black is quick to note that having a strong team makes it possible to meet customers' needs. She should know—she's held just about every position in the office, from analyst to customer service representative to account manager. "We all do whatever it takes," she said.

In one instance, a customer was a month late in ordering data circuits to be installed in a new building. With a willing staff working late nights and through the weekend, Ms. Black and her team met the customer's needs in four working days, rather than the 30 days the process usually requires.

Sometimes it gets crazy," she admits. "But we work it out and move on to the next thing," knowing that at the very least, she won't be bored. ■



Robin Black, left, and her team met the customer's needs in four working days, rather than the 30 days the process usually requires.

3 keys to a good customer relationship Robin Black's views on what it takes

Communication. "Face-to-face interaction is important to customers and to GTA. Our customers even drop by the office to say hello. Once you've built the relationship, you want to do well for each other."

Build a rapport. "We listen to the customer and help them find the right technology solution. That builds confidence."

Be honest. "Bumps in the road are inevitable, but if I'm upfront with customers, they can handle it." ■

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regional offices. The Milledgeville office was fully operational in early November. The Columbus office is scheduled to be fully operational in the first half of 2004.

Visit our Web site at www.gta.georgia.gov for frequently asked questions about the new procedures, easy e-mail links and contact information for all our regional telecom offices. ■

Governor appoints Tom Wade as GTA executive director, state CIO

Governor Sonny Perdue appointed Tom Wade as GTA's executive director and chief information officer (CIO) for the state of Georgia on November 10. Mr. Wade had served in an acting capacity since December 2002.

"I am very grateful for the opportunity Governor Perdue has given me to lead an agency that has such tremendous potential to make a positive difference for all state government," Mr. Wade said following his appointment. "We have the ability to support and improve the delivery of services provided by the state—increasing their effectiveness, reducing costs and improving efficiency. We must continue to find ways to be resourceful, to use our assets to add value and to be accountable."

Mr. Wade previously served as GTA's deputy director and chief operating officer.

Prior to joining GTA, he was deputy commissioner of the Department of Human Resources (DHR), where he oversaw operations, including some of the largest and most critical information technology systems in the state. He was also a DHR assistant commissioner with responsibility for policy formulation and implementation of health programs.

As policy director for former Governor Zell Miller, Mr. Wade was responsible for information technology policy and served on the board of the Georgia Center for Advanced Telecommunications Technology.

Cigdem Delano named COO

Mr. Wade has named Cigdem Delano as GTA's chief operating officer. She had served in an acting capacity since December 2002. Prior to joining GTA in September 2000, she was executive project manager at IBM Global Services.

Chris Tomlinson named general counsel

Mr. Wade also named Chris Tomlinson as GTA's general counsel. Mr. Tomlinson was previously deputy general counsel. Mr. Tomlinson joined GTA in October 2000 as director of legal services. He also worked for the Georgia Merit System and The Wright Law Firm in Atlanta. ■

New members appointed to GTA board

Two new members have been appointed to GTA's Board of Directors.

Roy H. Fickling was named by Speaker of the House Terry Coleman to succeed Dean Alford, whose term expired. Mr. Fickling is president of Fickling and Company, which provides commercial and residential real estate services and is based in Macon.

Hugh Kaplan was named by Lieutenant Governor Mark Taylor to succeed Brent Layton, who resigned from the board. Mr. Kaplan is a software executive from Alpharetta.

Both appointees will serve three-year terms. ■

GTA Vision

A more efficient and responsive government through the innovative use of technology.

GTA Mission

To deliver secure, reliable technology services and solutions, and provide guidance and oversight that lead to sound decisions for Georgia government.

Fast Forward Georgia

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